

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15

TRSE-00 OMB-01 SAJ-01 /071 W
----- 114044

R 031759Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8417
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USMISSION OECD PARIS

UNCLAS LONDON 19566

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVES RETAIN BY-ELECTION SEAT EASILY

REF: LONDON 17828

1. CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE ROBERT HODES JAMES, A FORMER
CLERK IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND UN OFFICIAL, DECEMBER
2 RETAINED HIS PARTY'S CAMBRIDGE SEAT, INCREASING THE
MARGIN OVER THE SECOND PLACE LABOR CANDIDATE. ON A LOW /
VOTER TURNOUT (52 PERCENT), RHODES JAMES MOVED THE
VICTORY EDGE FROM 2,800 TO 9,600 VOTES, WHICH REPRESENTED
A SWING OF SLIGHTLY LESS THAN TEN PERCENT TO THE TORIES.
THE SHIFT AWAY FROM LABOR WAS JUST OVER 10 PERCENT.
WHICH IS AT THE LOWER END OF THE RANGE OF CHANGES IN
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VOTER SENTIMENT REPORTED BY OPINION POLLS. THE LIBERAL

CANDIDATE, RUNNING IN THE CONSTITUENCY FOR THE FIFTH TIME, WAS ABLE TO HOLD EROSION IN THE LIBERAL VOTE TO ABOUT 4 PERCENT, FAR LESS THAN WOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED ON THE BASIS OF POLL DATA. (THE LIBERAL VOTE DROPPED FROM 21 TO 17 PERCENT OF THE TOTEL.) THREE MINOR CANDIDATES -- AN INDEPENDENT CONSERVATIVE, A NATIONAL FRONTER AND AN UNDERGRADUATE CARRYING THE "SCIENCE FICTION LOONEY" LABEL -- SOAKED UP 4.5 PERCENT OF THE POLL BETWEEN THEM (THERE WERE NO FRINGE CANDIDATES AT THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION).

2. COMMENT. THE OUTCOME FOLLOWED FORM, AND WILL RETURN THE GOVERNMENT'S WORKING MAJORITY IN COMMONS TO A SINGLE SEAT. THE SWING TO THE CONSERVATIVES, IN A TRADITIONALLY TORY SEAT, WAS SUBSTANTIALLY LESS THAN THE 15.9 AND 17.2 PERCENT SHIFTS IN THEIR FAVOR REGISTERED IN THE RECENT WORKINGTON AND WALSALL NORTH BY-ELECTIONS (REFTTEL). FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S STANDPOINT, THE CAMBRIDGE RESULTS SUGGEST THAT THE LARGER SWINGS AWAY FROM LABOR IN THE WALSALL NORTH AND NEWCASTLE BY-ELECTIONS (27 AND 24 PERCENT, RESPECTIVELY) WERE LARGELY DUE TO CIRCUMSTANCES PECULIAR TO THOSE CONSTITUENCIES. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE "NORMAL" BY-ELECTION SWING OF 5 TO 6 PERCENT AGAINST THE GOVERNING PARTY AND THE LOW TURNOUT, LABOR IS ENTITLED TO FEEL SOME RELIEF. WITH THREE MORE BY-ELECTIONS IN THE OFFING -- TWO OF THEM IN "SAFE" LABOR CONSTITUENCIES -- WE WILL SEE WHETHER CAMBRIDGE IS IN FACT MORE TYPICAL THAN WALSALL NORTH AND NEWCASTLE. THE LIBERALS, LIKE THE LABORITES, COULD FIND SOME SOLACE IN THEIR SHOWING.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, REPORTS, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976LONDON19566
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760449-0150
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761275/aaaacngn.tel
Line Count: 93
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 LONDON 17828
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: wolfsd
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 MAY 2004 by hattaycs>; APPROVED <10 AUG 2004 by wolfsd>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONSERVATIVES RETAIN BY-ELECTION SEAT EASILY
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, (JAMES, ROZERT HODES)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006